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GRĀMDĀN

[The Latest Phase Of Bhoodan]

The renunciation of private property in land on a mass scale through Gramdans, and realization of the fact that all land in a village belongs to the village community as a whole is the latest and most significant development of Bhoodan movement It is attracting wide-spread attention and appreciation Although the first Bhoodan was offered as far back as April, 1951 and the first Gramdan in May, 1952 with the rather unexpected and spontaneous action of the villagers of Mangroth in U P, it was only during and just after Vinobaji's foot-march through Orissa in 1955 that Gramdan assumed mass proportion By the end of 1955 about 600 villages in Koraput District alone had declared Gramdan.

Most of the villages in Koraput District and elsewhere in Orissa are populated by Adivasis, each village being generally inhabited by a single tribe The Adivasis have, by tradition, very little attachment for land Doubts were, threfore, raised that Gramdan will not succeed in non-Adivasi and mixed-population areas But the progress of the Gramdan movement soon dispelled this doubt In Tamilnad, where land is both valuable and scarce and the people comparatively more civilized, as also in the 'hard soil' of Maharashtra, Gramdans followed in large numbers By the end of 1956 the figure of Gramdans reached 17,00

in the whole of India Thus, it was clear that Gramdan was not a sporadic phenomenon possible only in special circumstances, but was a practical method of solving one of the most pressing problems of the day It was now apparent that Gramdan was the surest way to reach Gandhiji's ideal of Gramraj The Sarva Seva Sangh, therefore, on the occasion of the last Sarvodaya Sammelan held at Kalady (Kerala) appealed to the people of India, to all political parties and constructive workers to devote their time and energy for making the Gramdan movement a success

Speaking at the Development Commissioners' conference at Mussoorie on 29 4 1957 the Prime Minister, Pt Jawaharlal Nehru remarked "I agree with Acharya Vinobaji's ideal that land should be held in common by the people The Bhoodan movement has great significance for what it had achieved and for the new psychology it creates about land and land holdings and about the terrific passion for private possession of land The Gramdan villages offered the best chance of putting the idea of co operative endeavour into effect, in view of the fact that the usual difficulties arising out of the individual ownership of land did not obtain there"

Various other thinkers in India, including prominent Economists have acknowledged the possibilities inherent in Gramdan In the words of Vinoba, "Gramdan is the Call of the Time"

The movement of Gramdan is fast spreading The following table gives an idea of the number of Gramdans in each State by the end of August, 1957 :

State	No of Gramdans
Assam	77
Andhra	75
Orissa	1847
Uttar Pradesh	12
Kashmir	0
Keral	301
Punjab-Himachal	0
West Bengal	8
Bihar	97
Bombay	237
Madras	223
Madhya Pradesh	26
Mysore	15
Rajasthan	14
Total	2932

It is desirable to make one thing clear about the umber of Gramdan villages Though geographically orming a compact unit, some Gramdan villages do not orrespond to 'Revenue Villages', according to Government records The areas known as villages in 'Revenue Records' are also not based necessarily on a geographical r any other definite consideration Due to periodical hanges and readjustment, the revenue villages often ave their lands intermingled and scattered. The Revenue Villages', as also the Gramdan villages do not ollow any fixed pattern either in regard to population or rea The numbers given above, therefore, while generally orresponding with 'Revenue Villages', also differ from hem in some cases

The Urge Behind Bhoodan

People often think that the aim of Bhoodan is limited to the solution of the land problem While there is no doubt that the Bhoodan-Gramdan movement provides a basic remedy for the difficult problem of land in India, its aim has been much wider and deeper in scope from the very beginning When Vinoba entered Telangana in April, 1951, the uppermost thought in his mind was how to face the challenge of the then wide-spread violence there both on the part of the people and the Government The situation was serious If society was to be saved from disruption and eventual self destruction, it was essential to find out a non violent and peaceful remedy to meet the situation The same problem had presented itself in a different form and context about three years earlier, when after Gandhiji's death Vinoba was working among the Meyos and refugees near Delhi The landless Harijans amongst the refugees asked for land After some negotiations the Punjab Government promised to provide land to them but later went back on their words The Harijans were naturally pained and became agitated They thought of offering Satyagraha and sought Vinoba's advice Under the circumstances prevailing then, Vinoba advised against such a step But that was not enough A peaceful alternative was to be found out by which their grievances could be redressed and the landless provided with land

Gandhiji's greatest contribution to human thought and the progress of mankind was his insistence on the purity of means So far as the End is concerned, there

is seldom much difference But when we come to the means to achieve the end, the divergence begins People would not hesitate to employ any means, even if contrary to the 'End' Gandhiji set his foot firmly against this If the attainment of Truth, mutual love among men and peace in society were the ends, the means, too, must be truthful and non-violent Gandhiji succeeded to a great extent in introducing this principle in the political field It was only the extension of this principle to other and wider spheres that was agitating Vinoba's mind "The world", he said, "was passing through a grave and critical situation Science has placed a great power in the hands of man but it has also placed man in the hands of power Man was gradually becoming helpless in the face of the forces, science had released These forces were controlling man and making him dance to their tune The whole of the mankind was in the grip of a great fear The development of 'Ahimsa' or 'Soul Force' alone could lead man to shed this fear. The development of Soul Force, or the discovery of a non-violent technique for the solution of all our problems, including the greatest, is, therefore, my chief concern

"The land problem is a basic problem not only for India but also for many Asian countries And if we can solve it in a peaceful manner, our non-violent strength will grow Seeking a solution of the land problem is not my only objective. I am more concerned with the non-violent technique that comes into play in this movement I want you to view this movement from

this angle and in this spirit" (*Address to the A I C C at Brahmpur, 9 5 '55*)

Starting from the demand of a portion of their land from the landowners in Telangana with a view to remove the bitterness existing there between them and the landless, the movement soon developed into a demand for 1/6 share in the land, then for the removal of landlessness, and finally for relinquishing completely private ownership in land, i e, Gramdan

Beginning Of A New Phase

But Gramdan is not the end It is rather the beginning of a new phase It opens up new possibilities of social re construction and economic upliftment, of building up a new social order based on equality and co operation The voluntary renunciation of private property and eager acceptance of the new way of a life of sharing, unfolds a great deal of constructive social energy, repressed so far under the dead weight of an outmoded, exploitative and competitive social system Today whatever schemes of rural development we take in hand, there are two common drawbacks which attract our attention Firstly, the lack of popular enthusiasm for the development activities makes them unreal and superficial Secondly, the benefit of the development activities largely goes to that section in the village which is already comparatively well-to do and influential The lowest stratum of society, which needs the most help, remains largely untouched Gramdan removes this possibility because of the psychological change it involves

Here is a movement that has succeeded in at least subduing, if not eliminating, the individual traits in the peasantry, has put hope into the underdog, and yet has not generated friction or ill-will, having based itself on the purely peaceful methods of persuation

But it may be pertinently asked as to what extent is the success of the movement due to the real psychological changes brought about in the minds of people? No one would be expecting a sudden and complete change in the outlook of all those concerned It is but natural that there should be all the gradations from the highest levels of understanding and ideological maturity to the lowest levels of herd mentality. There have been a few regressions also But all this only underlines the fact that the Gramdan villages are inhabited by similar men of flesh and blood as we all are When selfishness is rampant everywhere and even those who call themselves civilized and educated are not able to rise above their petty self-interests, why should we expect too much to the contrary from the village-folk? Mangroth in Uttar Pradesh was the first gramdan village The story of the ups and downs in the people's feelings during the first year or two is a gripping one Self-interest and the propoganda carried on by vested interests outside, raised its head again and again only to be put down each time by better instincts Goodness finally triumphed, and Mangroth today stands as a fine example of the subjugation of individual self-interests to the interests of the society There were 107 families in all in Mangroth 67 of them owned lands 40 were landless out of

which 13 families depended for their livelihood merely on chance agricultural employment Today all the families in Mangroth, except four who have other occupations and did not want land, have got land Eighty six acres of fallow land have been made cultivable by common effort A big tank has been dug, village roads have been built, a common village orchard has been grown and individual cultivation has also been improved The result is whereas four years ago the village used to produce only 6 to 8 months' requirements of its food, today it produces enough, and a little more, to meet its total requirements The village people have now turned their attention towards production of and self sufficiency in cloth In the first eight months they have already produced 996 square yards Thus the village is pulsating with a new life The people have begun to realize that they can make or mar their own fortune

An estimate of the degree of psychological change may also be formed from the experiences of land distribution The villagers themselves fix the principles of redistribution, as to which family should get how much land etc The ideal being equal distribution per capita, in many cases the villagers themselves preferred to give some extra land to the erstwhile bigger owners Persons surrendering hundreds acres of land received only a few acres, not even amounting to two figures In Bihar near Khadi gram, Gramdan villages have established their own grain centres, have even pooled their debts and shared expenses in social ceremonies like marriage

The above are only illustrations of how the Gramdan

movement is generating a new spirit and a new outlook in the rural areas No doubt there are black spots, as everywhere else in human affairs, but there are enough bright spots for those who wish to derive new hopes and inspiration

Agricultural Pattern After Gramdan.

What is the pattern of cultivation followed after Gramdan ? It is left to be decided by the people concerned. It may be emphasized that the Sarvodaya ideal wants to replace the present competitive society by a co-operative one, and the acquisitive instinct based on private property by the instinct of sacrifice in the interests of society Mutual co-operation and the co-operative instinct are, therefore, always encouraged, but the final decision about the pattern of cultivation must be left to the villagers They are, however, encouraged to experiment The result has been that even today the agricultural pattern in Gramdan villages differs from anything between individual farming and complete common cultivation A certain percentage of land is generally set apart for common cultivation, even when individual cultivation is the common mode In some villages co-operatives have also been formed But whatever the pattern of cultivation, Gramdan results in some fundamental changes being brought about in the situation Individual ownership in land gives place to village ownership Individual allotments are subject to periodical redistribution Collective payment of rent is facilitated Land improvement and common irrigation arrangements

become possible, and a new vista of agricultural improvement and increased production is opened out before the villagers

Priorities Of Reconstruction

Apart from agricultural improvement, crop planning and provision of irrigation facilities, the following items have usually to be taken up in the villages after Gramdan—

1 The problem of the provision of credit assumes immediate importance after Gramdan Not only the traditional money lender, but even banks and Government agencies have been slow to appreciate the spirit behind the change and refused to advance credit, as no land was left with the individual cultivator While Government agencies and banks also must be approached, particular efforts should be made to persuade the money-lenders to continue credit facilities

2 Establishment of a co-operative store for marketing village produce and importing requirements from outside

3 Promotion of village industries as subsidiary to agriculture, particularly self-sufficiency in cloth

4 Provision of Basic Education

5 Settlement of local disputes in the village itself

6 Health, Hygiene and Sanitation Schemes

Village Organization

How will all these activities be co ordinated ? What would be the nature of village organization ?

The Gramdan villages provide an excellent opportunity for an experiment of direct democracy In modern democracy the people seldom function directly except

for periodically electing their representatives This functioning through representatives has created many problems and has led to many abuses But in a centralized system, working through representatives and representative institutions becomes inevitable In villages we can avoid this evil

It would, therefore, be appropriate to leave the direction of all village activities in the hands of the Gram-Sabha consisting of all men and women of the village above the age of sixteen The Gram-Sabha would meet from time to time as and when new problems arise and new tasks present themselves The Gram-Sabha may appoint Ad-hoc Committees for different activities or works It would, however, not be advisable to appoint an executive or a Panchayat to conduct all village activities for a fixed period This would again introduce the element of representative democracy at the village level The Gram-Sabha should be free to make its own rules and regulations for the conduct of its business and for carrying on its various activities A co-operative society or societies may be formed for farming, marketing organization of village industries and other such economic activities But multiplicity of organizations should be avoided as for as possible

The Hurdles

The difficulties in reconstruction work either arise out of the short-comings of the worker himself or due to the lack of understanding by others concerned, of the new social and economic values sought to be established by the movement We have indicated above as to how credit

has been refused to Gramdan villages by Government Departments and banks Surely such difficulties should disappear with a growing appreciation of the new values of Gramdan and with the necessary and relevant changes in the various laws, rules and regulations For example, it should be easier and safer, on the contrary, to advance credit to Gramdan villages The collective security offered by the whole village should be considered much superior instead of the security offered by an individual

In a Gramdan village, individual ownership of land ceases The whole village becomes a unit After Gramdan the cultivators of Mangroth found themselves in a quandary, because the Revenue Authorities insisted on the payment of land revenue by individual cultivators, while the land had already become a common pool The people of Mangroth had even to undergo imprisonment before the higher authorities put matters right Mangroth now pays its land revenue collectively We now hear about another similar trouble brewing up in Mangroth This time the authorities seem to be recognizing the fact of common ownership with a vengeance They have assesed Mangroth to be liable for payment of Agricultural Income Tax usually levied on big farms above a certain acreage Gramdan villagers are thus sometimes put to unnecessary harassment for want of sympathetic understanding of the new situation These may be the teething troubles, but they must be put right soon, if the villagers are not to feel that they have invited unnecessary troubles by declaring Gramdan

Another difficulty which is being experienced in

Gramdan villages is the lack of adequate resources for providing the necessary implements, bullocks etc The villages have already been drained almost to the last drop, and it is not possible for them to raise the necessary resources Society, including the Government, must come to their rescue.

Last, but the most important, is the hurdle created by the lack of properly trained and adequate human material for shouldering the huge task of reconstruction work in the villages. It is a challenge which must be met. Here is an opportunity for the educated, be they doctors, engineers, teachers, technicians or economists to repay a part of the debt which they owe to the toiling and producing masses

The Call

But, as we have seen, the starting point of all this reconstruction work is Gramdan Without Gramdan all this may be meaningless The first step, therefore, is to apply the combined energy of all of us for pushing up the movement of Gramdan It is a national task to which all of us should put their shoulders. There is another important reason why Gramdan and the reconstruction work based on it has become an urgent necessity The world situation is very uncertain None knows when a major War may break out If this happens, the whole economy of our nation is bound to be affected In such an event we could save the millions who inhabit the country-side from hunger and destruction only, f village economy is strengthened to meet

atleast its own food and cloth requirements Without this there may be chaos and confusion which would greatly jeopardise the defence of the country It is, therefore, as a 'defence measure' too, as Vinoba calls it, that Gramdan is essential

The doubt may arise in our minds as to whether it would be possible for common people in adequate numbers to rise to the heights of sacrifice necessary for renouncing private ownership in land and for subordinating individual interest to the interests of society But the people have already given the answer Thousands have renounced their ownership in land and lacs have given Bhoodan The situation, as Vinoba says, is ripe It is for us to seize the opportunity

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Ninth Sarvodaya Sammelan, Kalady

(Resolution adopted by the Akhil Bharat Sarva Seva Sangh)

The Bhoodan movement has in the process of its growth come to a very significant stage It always aimed at a fundamental social transformation, redistribution of land was only the first step The Time-Spirit demands that the world should live together as one family A revolution takes place when in response to the call of the times men rise to the need of the hour with a determined purpose Gandhiji demonstrated this by forging the weapon of Satyagraha and inspired people to fight for the freedom That not only brought freedom to this country but also introduced non-violence as a force in politics

Bhoodan was the next step in the Gandhian Social technique Bhoodan introduced non-violence in the economic and social spheres The ideal of brotherhood has acquired a concrete form and it has been demonstrated that it is capable of being realized in practice Vinobaji has shown a new way of solving social problems by appealing to compassion in the hearts of men Realizing that it was not right to eat when one's neighbour is starving, people began to give land in Bhoodan. The Sarva Seva Sangh undertook under the guidance of Vinobaji to spread the message of Bhoodan throughout the country. They resolved to collect 25 lakhs acres of land for distributing to the landless The target was fulfilled before time Simultaneously the movement acquired a wider horizon The need for an early solution of the problem of the landless became apparent and it was

decided that five crore acres of land should be collected for distribution to all the one crore of landless families in the country But even before the fulfilment of the target the movement revealed new possibilities People in nearly two thousand and five hundred villages have given all their land in Gramdan voluntarily and have surrendered their ownership in land The original target of collecting five crore acres of land naturally merges itself in the new resolve to end private ownership in land altogether

We have now to devote our entire energy to Gramdan in 1957 The year 1957 has a special significance for the people They have a feeling that some revolutionary social change is imminent Gramraj of Gandhiji's dream alone can fulfil this aspiration Gramdan is the foundation of this Gramraj Gramdan has a general appeal to all thinking men and all political parties in the country welcomed it We must therefore work for Gramdan with determination

To a fear stricken world standing on the brink of a third world war India can convey the message of peace and love through Bhoodan and Gramdan Vinobaji has resolved to continue his walking pilgrimage till Gramraj is achieved in India If the nation takes up the movement, it is quite possible to achieve this revolution in 1957. We appeal to the people, the political parties in the country and particularly to constructive workers to realize the urgency of the situation and throw themselves heart and soul in the Gramdan movement

Land collected & distributed in different Provinces up to Dec.. 56.

1	2	3	4	5